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UNIVERSITY OF LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

INFORMANT: SPAULDING ALDRICH

CONDUCTED BY: DOUG REYNOLDS

DATE: MARCH 3, 1989

S=SPAULDING

D=DOUG

SG-BV-T101

D: I thought we'd start by a just having you give a little information about your background, where you were born, where you grew up, your family.

S: Born in Northbridge, educated in Northbridge, grew up in Northbridge, and I've lived in Northbridge almost all of my life, with a few brief sojourns, outside, with the service a year in Spent on the West coast, a bit of time spent down South, a little bit of time in Canada.

D: Your parents work in the mills?

S: No.

D: What did they do?

S: My mother was a schoolteacher, my father assisted my grandfather in his business, until after WW2, at which time he worked in the White Machine Works, for about 11 years.

D: I see. How big was your family?

S: His family was only his brother, himself, a foster sister, and an adopted sister.

D: OK, how big was the family you grew up in?

S: Just my sister and myself.

D: I see. And your parents, did they migrate to Whitensville?

S: My mother was born in Jersey City, grew up in Canada, Nova Scotia, and came to Whitensville, ah, Northbridge, as a teacher. My father lives, ah, was born in Oxbridge, came to Northbridge in when he was six months old, my grandfather was born in Menden, was from another town anyway. So, in a sense, the Aldrichs' have lived here for 325 years.

D: And when were you born?

S: '32

D: OK, so you grew up in Whitensville, at a time when the corporation was undergoing dramatic changes with its relation in the community. Could you describe some of these changes?

S: Yes, not being closely associated with the mill itself, um, nor anybody in my family to that extent, other than seeing the mill as a church, and that kind of thing. The change started in 1946, or 1947, during the first strike, when the union first came in. The second strike, which was the most severe one, um, '52, '53, I was overseas in the air force at the time, and other than getting some newspaper clippings, about the, some pretty intense violence, involved. I wasn't here, so I didn't have to even be an onlooker.

Um, One of the things that happened shortly after that was, that the Dupont Corporation made a an offer to the then Board of Directors, Ecan Swift was president, Sydney Mason, Ralph Lincoln, Murray Keeler, um, I can't remember them all. I would say those were the biggest names. Ecan Jr, J.U Bolton, Jack Jr., Jack Bolton Jr. to buy the whole plant. In my Perspective, that was the biggest mistake the family ever made, was not selling to the Dupont at that time. Um, but I am sure, that in their minds even though that a couple of them are reaching the end of the line, they just didn't foresee that the 'family' would also reach the end of the line. The real changes came in the sixties.

D: What were those changes?

S: Ah, the hiring of a consultant, Booze, Hamilton & Elm, um, to assist them with their problems up there. Um,

D: What kind of problems?

S: They had problems with, they had always had a magnificent cash flow up there. And they were getting into other areas at the time, and I can't be too specific, only, because again, I just wasn't involved with the shop because it was not.. But, by '62, which was three or four years after the death of Ecan Swift, tender offers were made for the corporation. And those finally came about in '67, when White Consolidated took over. White Consolidated, quite frankly at that time, was the White, was the White Sewing Machine Company if I'm not mistaken. And the four million dollar a year company took over, 65 million dollar a year company took over, worth a lot of land, nobody was

interested at the time, a lot of cash flow, (unclear), um , but these experts were brought in because they got into the ATF Davidson, the offset duplicating business. And they were developing, they were also doing some work for somebody called Gettstetna at that time. Which was also big in the offset business. And the research department which was across the street here, at the old, which is now, the Continental Apartments, they spent millions, a couple of million dollars, as I understand it, to try to develop a drum. Well its' very specific... and that just went down the drain. The consultants were in and they didn't seem to do anything but, in one instance, the guy who came in as the acting president employed his brother-in-law for a year as the vice president. Now, I don't have a very high regard for Booze, Elm & Hamilton, or their internationally known consulting firm. At the same time, they were having these internal conflicts, um, between the family and the non-family members, and the outsiders if you will, was the growth of European competition. Um, which didn't affect this organization as much as it affected the Draper and its' loom.

D: Are you talking about West German?

S: Pardon?

D: West German loom production?

S: West German, Swiss, um, West German and Swiss basically. As I understand there was some competition from French machines also, but not a lot. So they had, a lot of things came together in the sixties that didn't bolt well for the White Machine Works.

D: Let's talk about social change in the community until then. Now the company obviously ran a huge paternalistic program, right?
In the thirties and tried to in the fourties?

S: I think the paternalistic program, yeah, THEY lived on the hill, We lived in the valley. Um , didn't make any difference, whether unless there was a old, old, old family that lived way up on the hill, but I mean, there was a certain area of the hill um, starting right up here above the tennis courts, to the crown of the second hill, Taylor Hill as it was known. And that was family, and executives. No one else. Do not apply. The land is not for sale and were not going to rent you a house. Nor are you going to be able to buy a piece of land. And that's were they lived. Um, or on Chestnut Street. And that's alright, they owned it. Um, but its also in the structure of the housing. From the village, to this area, to around the town, all to the area down (unclear) street. (unclear) You knew who worked where, but where they lived.

D: Yeah

S: That's they way it worked.

D: What affect did unionization at the plant have on the community?

S: It introduced some divisiveness. Um, but I think it was probably long overdue. It's ah, I'm going to have to say it probably really well affected the community as it affected every community (unclear) who came out of the

depression, no one owned an automobile. For all intent and purposes, very few families had automobiles. Travel at best, was a consolidated bus ride to Worcester. And all of a sudden, they saw Paris'. Um, and that's true. And back they came, and it was like every place else in the country. And its never going to be the same again. And we've been out there, and we've seen what's out there. And you know your not going to impress us any longer, if you will. Now this was not impressing in the sense, the housing here is still good housing, over 100 years old, still fine housing. Couple that change of attitude with the introduction of the union and the (unclear) to go by the boards.

D: When we talk about some of the ideals involved ah, democracy vs. capitalism, could you , maybe, explore these things?

S: Well, you have to remember that the family as we call it, made their money back in the days when there were no taxes. You know, capitalism was rampant, in that sense. Um, and when they really weren't hindered by any particular labor law or those kinds of things. Maybe to some extent, I mean I don't really know what labor laws were in the twenties well, the thirties. I would have to presume there weren't many of them. Um, certainly not back in the teens, and the (unclear) years right after the turn of the century. Um, they were used to that and they had a very specific system. in the White Machine Works. It was a magnificently planned plant. And they knew were everything was going and but they always restricted you. Example; Most jobs had a set up man. You never learned how to set up your machine. Foremans were not foremans, they were boss. The boss was limited to production problems only and nothing else. Never learned the administration of the department. And that was somewhat deliberate. Somewhat deliberate. Although, all local people moved up in that sense, nevertheless, you were always limited in what you were allowed to know. Um, Paternally, no one was unemployed. However, After the introduction of the union and the introduction of the work rules, um, then came the (unclear) study. Stinner motion studies, um, the setting of rates for piece work. Um, things became far more stratified and far more adversarial in a sense. And, that family feeling began to dissipate, and quite frankly it passed with the death of Ecan Swift. Um, I wouldn't call him an (unclear) man I think he was a compassionate person, but he was a very wealthy industrialist and cared for his community very much. And they gave a great deal to this town, and we have building after building to prove it. Nevertheless they were the boss, and we weren't. And there were some people who resided in this community, that weren't really involved with either the workers or the family in a working sense. Kind of disinterested or interested observers of the same.

D: Would these the shopkeepers and others?

S: Sure, my grandfather for example, owning in those days, was known as a grocery business. Today, would be a supermarket , I suppose. But in those days, you owned a grocery store. And he had, you know, seven or eight trucks, and they delivered to all the houses in town. And he sat on the bank board with the family members and he went to the Congregational Church because we were real Congregationalist, because some of the executives would come, and they would be instantaneous congregationalist. That was the church to go to.

D: Yeah,

S: So we kind of looked at them you know, knew all of them, um, but never knew them in that sense, because you lived down there.

D: How did the, we might call them the petty bourgeois, how did they relate to the unionization of the plant?

S: They didn't like it. they did not like being told what an individual worker should get. But they learned to live with it very quickly. And after, you know, a couple of very bitter strikes and strikes, by there very nature, are bitter, if you reach that point, then they are going to be bitter. Um, and violence on the picket lines in the early fifties was certainly not unknown in this country. Um, I suppose they looked south to some extent, with envy to the right to work states, but everything that was south produced textile, not textile machinery. There always was a difference, this was textile preparatory machinery. It was not textiles. Textiles went away in the early fifties, the last ones disappeared, but not the shop. The shop could of survived, too. They just didn't seem to know how.

D: OK, When we look at the role of what we call the middle class and this change, working class vs. the rich owners, um, what role did they play in changing the community over from corporate control?

S: Um, there was good and bad. Um, with the loss of corporate control, and the White Machine Works, was far seeing enough to start selling their housing back in the fifties. Um, ridding themselves of that, and that was a wise move. Um, and the workers got some great buys on property by the way. But they took care of the streets, the houses. And they really didn't need to do that anymore. I mean those days were gone, and they recognize that, um, long before they started downhill in the business. Once that started, of course, that starts the change thing, because, now the worker who worked on the spindle job suddenly owns his home, and is a homeowner, and has somewhat , some control over himself, has an obligation, and a responsibility, and controls he never had before.

D: Does he become a better citizen?

S: Pardon?

S: Does he become a better citizen?

D: If I look back at all the families I knew in this town, who walked to work at the shop, and went by the ringing of the bell, cause that what, your life was on that bell, the bell tower. and you could hear it all over town. They were all good citizens, anyway. They voted. They attended town meeting, in better numbers than we do today. Um, they had minor positions in town. The Board of selectman was always reflective of the demographics of the town. Not saying the family didn't control from the front office, but always was reflective of that. What happened when the landlords became absentee, yes, then the town took it's own destiny. There was a lot of floundering in the beginning. Because, there was no longer, you sat down in what is now the treasurers office, used to be the selectman's room, on a Monday night, no longer Tuesday morning could someone call the front office for assistance, it wasn't there anymore. And that was very good assistance, I mean engineering

assistance, monetary assistance administrative help,. that kind of thing it was gone. We had to do everything ourselves.

D: Was that a struggle?

S: Pardon?

D: Was that a struggle?

S: That was a struggle, whether those involved at the time would admit it or not, that was a struggle. Um, the analogy is not very good, but it reminds me of baby birds first learning to fly. Our town government at that time did OK, but didn't do , in my mind terribly well. In part, there is still a slight hangover even

today. You remember when, you often hear that, "you remember when," and um, because there was leadership. And, its never been completely replaced. We lost the whole executive class in this town. I mean they had true executives up there. Highly trained individuals, who knew what do to in an industrial setting. And we lost all of those people. And you know, as individuals, they didn't always agree with the "family" or the "shop". And they were good town officials. You can't take those people out, almost (unclear) and the three year period and the whole thing is gone. And replace them with well meaning citizens who don't have that same kind of training. That's very difficult for a town and that's what happened here.

D: Yeah, Um, I wanted to ask you about ethnic and sexual relations, gender relations. We know that in Whitensville that certain ethnic groups worked certain jobs, but what do you remember about all of this?

S: Well, I'm not ethnic, and um, other than one summer, one brief period after the the service when I needed the job, right after the Korean War, I had to work in the White Machine Works. However, I do remember some things. When I did my history book of the town, I had article called 'The Unique Mix', and indeed it is, an unique mix. And that is an overused word today, but in instance, it a sense for the town of Northbridge it isn't In addition to the large French Canadian, ah, population which is mainly involved in the textile mills, Rockdale as opposed to here, although we had a French Canadians in large numbers who worked in the White Machine Works, but nevertheless, basically they came down to work in the textile mills, at (unclear) . You also had Polish, you had Armenian, Irish, and (unclear) Dutch. Armenian and (unclear) Dutch was a rather interesting mixture in any community. Um, but the Frecian Dutch, or, if I may use the term, and I don't mean it in a derogatory sense, but they are Separatist. They are separate in a part in a community, because their entire life revolves around their church, and their church , in those days, was basically made up of Freeslanders. The Armenians, came here, and were recruited in Europe by the White (unclear) um, on the advise, of one of the drapers, who thought that they had found maybe the best workers they could get, of a lot of immigrant groups. And they were rockier, and and a lot of them ended up in the Foundry area. The foundry, the rattle room, the core room, dreary, hot, hard jobs. I can show you a payroll book from 1906, with half the names are Armenian, and the half names are Yankee, believe it or not. Yankee names in the foundry. However, the Armenians were held down to the foundry, and even today they have never forgotten it. Um, and I'll have

friends of mine mention it to me occasionally Because that's the way the system worked.

D: Yes, absolutely. What about the housing? Was that segregated?

S: No. Not segregated in that sense. You had (unclear) .You had a lot of people of English descent. Well, it was (unclear) up in Forest Street, and almost all of them were skilled craftsmans from England, many of them from Lancanshire.

D: They were the skilled machinists, right?

S: Or foremen, they were brought here as foremen. um, they worked , or they worked they were skilled machinist, and skilled carpenters. Extraordinarily skilled carpenters. we had a great deal of the homes in the hill were filled with hand carved furniture. They were made right here in our carpenter shop. You had a large number of Armenians living on D Street, in the village, upper Boarder Street, however, I'm not so sure, and I'm sure the shop assigned it that way. But immigrant groups, and well they should, like to stick together. I mean, you don't want, you don't, a non-speaking English family doesn't want to live next to another non-speaking English family, one speaks French, one speaks Armenian, one speaks Dutch. that's never going to work. So they tend, you know, the Dutch congregated in certain areas in the village along Main Street, for example, the (unclear) lived, the Bossners; lived, they had been here a bit longer than the Armenians so by the time I was in high school, some lived in private homes. Um, although , when you think back on it, there weren't a hell of a lot of private homes, in this house, in this town. I lived in a home on Linwood Avenue, where Jack Driscoll lives now, and that was the only house down there, when I was a boy. It was owned by a cemetery. Who owned the cemetery? The family owned the cemetery. Although, we never called it a shop house, it was, no, no, it was owned by the cemetery. Um, the French Canadians, um a number of French Canadian families, all the French Canadian lived right over here on Fletcher Street. Um, those are the ones that came here back in the 1870's. Um, of course Rockdale was all French Canadian. Yes, I'm sure there was design to it, but I don't think, and there might have been a design with an ulterior motive, but whatever it was it worked. It worked to the satisfaction of the people, too. However, it was apparent, until the fifties and early sixties, that if you were of a certain ethnic group you really didn't get very far. Um, until management started to change. Um, (unclear) but then again, how many people go into a shop, whatever it is, and end up vice president? Damn few. Whether it fifty years ago or today, you don't start as a machinist or apprentice and end up as vice-president usually.

D: I want to just switch this over a little bit and talk about your history and talk about your life a little bit. Have you spent your life in public service?

S: oh, the last twenty years, and I have been a major or minor player in the county (unclear) .

D: Have you ever been in business?

S: Have I worked in the private sector?

D: Right.

S: Yes.

D: What did you do?

S: I worked at Raytheon Corporation for a couple of years.

D: Where is that located?

S: On project Apollo, in the early days, nothing important, I was a reliability control analyst. Until this day, I'm sure what it was.

D: Was that here in Northbridge?

S: No, that was in Waltham, I was one of the early ones who started driving the other side of Rte 128.

D: OK, Just for the tape sake, what is your job title now?

S: Town Administrator.

D: Do you have anything else you would like to add to this?

S: I've don't, heard too many people be somewhat hard on the family. And I don't really think they deserve it. What were doing is applying today standards to half a century ago, and you can't do that. When you look around to the housing, and you look at the White Community Center, the Congregational Church, the Bank building, the library, the old high school building, that was built in 1963. (unclear) And you look at this building that they gave to the town, um, the Aldrich school, cost the town \$13,000, something like that. I mean they gave great leaders to this community, because they were proud of their community, and took good care of it and it was after all an industrial park in the fullest sense. White Machine Works, at one time employed 6000 people. That is not an insignificant amount. So this was a factory town. I've seen a lot of little factory villages throughout the network, but I have never seen anything like this. What they left, and as we still have , looks good. So I think that what's happening is people do apply today's standards to something 15 -100 years ago. ... (unclear)

S: That's real common.

D: To me, they had the life, they were (unclear) leadership. They really were. They were strong. They didn't hold people back from voting. They participated in the democratic process. They wouldn't do that.

S: Thank you very much.